

If these walls could talk, what would they say?

By Kim Upshaw
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In the late 1800’s a 23-year-old man moved from the warm familiarity of his successful life in Pennsylvania to the rugged untamed westernmost part of the United States, known as California. When that man arrived, he took a parcel of undeveloped land and, along with his vision of prosperity and success, made an indelible mark on what we know today as Naval Base Ventura County Port Hueneme.

The man in question is Thomas R. Bard, United States Senator (CA 1900-1905) and successful railroad man. When Bard arrived in Southern California there was no Port Hueneme, there was no Ventura County, and there was no ‘Berylwood’ (the original name of the Bard Mansion). But by the time of his death in 1915, there were all of these things and many more, all due to his hard work and dedication.

Bard was sent west to California by the railroad magnate, Thomas Scott. He was impressed by Bard’s work ethic when he was employed by Scott as the supervisor of the trains transporting supplies to the Union troops during the Civil War. Scott asked Bard to venture out to California and handle his properties.

In 1868, four years after he arrived in what is now Ventura County, he acquired all of Scott’s land interests for \$150,000 in ‘gold coin of the United States.’ Over a period of 10 years and after several court battles involving squatter’s rights of a number of settlers, in 1878 Bard was the owner of 40 subdivisions for a total of 21,375 acres. The Bard Estate, as we know it today, is only a 20-acre portion of the original land mass owned by Bard.

In 1871 Bard selected the site where the Bard Mansion now stands to be the site of his family’s home, ‘Berylwood.’ He selected the location due to it’s close proximity to the Hueneme Wharf and the development of Hueneme as a seaport. The house was the third home the Senator built on this site. The original home was a one-story, two bedroom house that Bard occupied with his new bride, Mary Beatrice Gerberding, upon returning from their honeymoon in 1876. The original home boasted a zinc-lined bathtub and was the first home in the area with indoor plumbing.

The second home built on the site was an enlargement of the original home. Using it as the main floor, Bard added two stories and an elevated water tank making a three-story home with a gravity water supply. Built around 1890 the gravity water supply was again a standout feature in the home.

The third home built on the site is the home as we know it today. The 1890 home was torn down to make room for the new home to be built. Much of the lumber from the old house was re-used in the new house and can easily be identified in the attic of the present building. Construction of Berylwood was completed in 1912. The final cost to build their dream home was \$110,000.

Senator and Mrs. Bard moved into the home in December 1912, but by the time they moved in all of but the youngest of their eight children were grown and had already moved away. The new “Berylwood” boasted 17,400 square feet of floor space, a passenger elevator, 12 bedrooms, seven full bathrooms and four half-baths.

Bard surrounded the mansion with a variety of ornamental trees of international origins. There were originally 260 trees from 27 countries. Places as far away as China, New Zealand and Australia were represented on the lawns of Berylwood. A majority of these trees still stand today as a testament to Bard’s interest in horticulture and his love of Berylwood.

Bard passed away in 1915, less than three years after the completion of his home, but Mrs. Bard continued to live there year-round until 1934 when she transferred her winter residency to Ojai. She continued to use the house until her death in 1937. The house stood vacant until 1944 when the Navy leased it at an annual rent of \$6,479. The rent was later increased to \$9,300 which the government continued to pay until February 28, 1951 when they acquired the property for a purchase price of \$149,500. When the Navy purchased it, Berylwood consisted of 62.4 acres.

The Navy used the building as an officer’s club and bachelor’s officer quarter during World War II. It was later converted to an officer’s club only. After the Navy’s purchase of Berylwood renovations began on the house that included the removal of the elevator, enclosure of the North porch for a dining area and an enclosure of the South porch to make a cocktail lounge and bar. On Sept. 15, 1977, Berylwood was entered on the National Register of Historic Places.

In January of 1980 the Bard Mansion, was renovated to make the building safer in an earthquake. After almost five years structural improvements, the officer’s club at Port Hueneme re-opened and today remains one of the most popular places in the county for upscale social functions..

Some of the other buildings from the original estate were also obtained when the Navy purchased the property in 1951. The historic Richard Bard House was used as Quarters ‘A,’ the Construction Battalion Center commander’s quarters, and is currently occupied by Capt. Jim Cowell and his family. The Milk House was remodeled and is now quarters ‘E,’ and the barn which was torn down in 1951 boasted a dance hall and seven single car garages.

Bard himself is often referred to as the “Father of Ventura”. Aside from the legacy of his beloved Berylwood, he served as a member of the Board of Supervisors of Santa Barbara County (1868-1873), he laid out the town of Hueneme and was partly responsible for the success of the Hueneme Wharf, as well as the builder of similar wharfs in Ventura, Santa Barbara, Lompoc, Gaviota, Santa Monica and Santa Rosa Island. Bard also was one of the commissioners appointed to organize the county of Ventura in 1871, and served as the Director of the State Board of Agriculture in 1886 and 1887.

Senator Thomas R. Bard passed away in 1915 at the age of 73. His legacy lives on in the history of Ventura County, in his former home and in his civic-minded descendants and every person who chooses to have the courage to dream a dream, and make a difference.

Background Photo By PH3 Anthony R.Hayes
Photos Supplied by CBC Archives



The second “Berylwood” 1885



Garden Party at the new and current Berylwood in 1913. A painting made from this photo now hangs in the officers club.



Senator Bard with children on the steps leading to the second home.



The lobby of the present Bard Mansion on the day the family moved in.



The Third Berylwood, now Bard Mansion, one year after its completion.



Senator Bard's desk in his study. From this desk Senator Bard nominated George S. Patton to U.S.M.A Westpoint. As well as founding Union 76 (now Unocal) Oil company. The desk is now in the lobby and the study is now the ladies room.